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Biographic Report

The New Argentine Junta

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CR 76-11461
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PREFACE

In the early morning hours of 24 March 1976, the Argentine armed forces, in a long-awaited, well-executed bloodless coup, overthrew the government of President María Estela (Isabel) Martínez de Perón. The wife of the late President (1946-55; 1973-74) Juan Perón, Mrs. Perón came to power as her husband's constitutional successor upon his death on 1 July 1974. Relying almost exclusively on a handful of loyal, rightwing Peronists, the unskilled and incompetent Mrs. Perón for many months had presided over an inept, almost nonfunctioning administration. The former President is currently in military custody. She leaves behind severe economic problems, widespread terrorist violence and a fragmented body politic.

In 1973, embarrassed and chastened by 7 years (1966-73) of ineffective military rule, the armed forces had withdrawn from politics, hoping that the civilians could succeed where they had failed. As it became increasingly apparent that neither Mrs. Perón nor her opposition could deal with Argentina's complex problems, coup sentiment grew. Lt. Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla, Commander in Chief of the Army, counseled patience, however, in an effort to give the administration every opportunity to reverse its destructive course or fall of its own ineptitude. With subordinates placing increasingly intensive pressures on the service chiefs to act, Videla, finally ready with a plan for a new government, executed the *coup de grâce* to bury a government that had died months before. By the time the overthrow came, the populace was resigned to it. Because of overwhelming popular opposition to the Peronist administration and the military's attention to positive public relations, Argentines greeted the military's reentry into politics with relief.

A junta composed of Videla and the two other service chiefs, Navy Adm. Emilio Massera and Air Force Brig. Gen. Orlando Agosti, took power on 24 March 1976 and will govern the country. Sworn in on 29 March 1976 as the 39th President of Argentina, Videla will act as Chief of State, but the supreme authority will rest with the junta. In addition, the new President is expected to work closely with a nine-man legislative council composed of senior military officers, to give the impression that authority is diffused and that numerous viewpoints are represented in the new administration.

The junta has moved quickly and efficiently to institutionalize its rule. The members have stressed their intention to avoid extreme repression, and their approach to date has been moderate. They will emphasize law and order, giving top priority to countering terrorism, but within a legal framework.

This report was prepared by the Central Reference Service and was coordinated within CIA as appropriate. Comments and questions may be directed to [redacted]

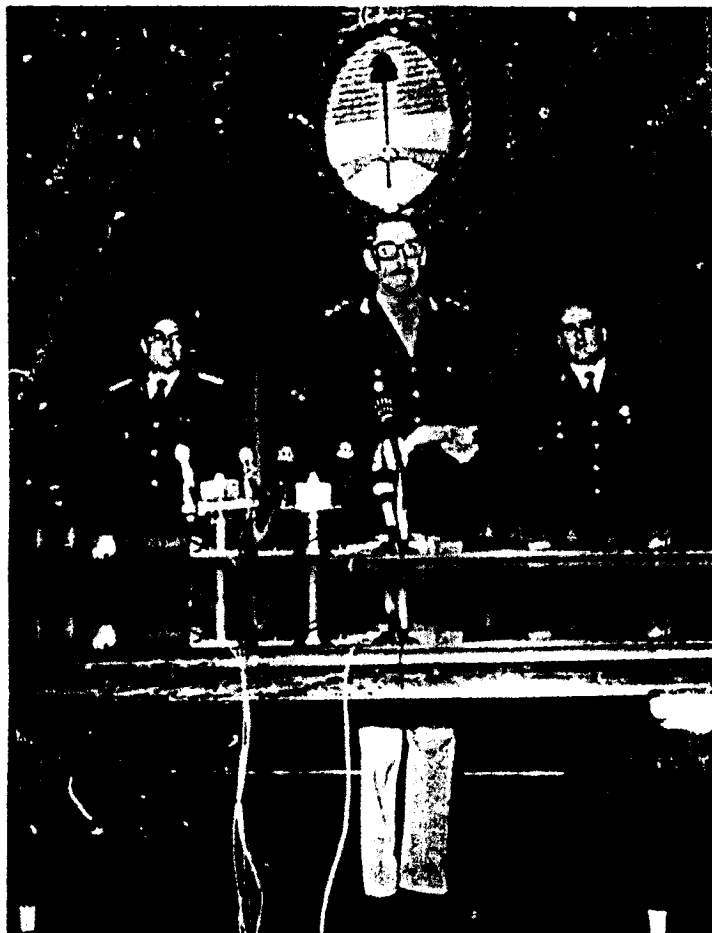
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The new junta

They will try to implement an austerity program that will stress fiscal responsibility, export promotion, favorable attention to the neglected agricultural sector, a positive attitude toward foreign investment, and less overall state participation in the economy. They have taken over with a hope of restoring a sense of social, economic and political well-being to the ailing nation. Whether they can accomplish this goal remains to be seen. The junta has not indicated how long the military will rule but has stated that no chief will represent his branch of the service on the junta for more than 3 years.

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The three junta members, all about 50 years old, are [redacted] professional military officers. Videla and Agosti are relatively new to the position of commander in chief, having taken their posts in August and December 1975, respectively, while Massera has been head of the navy for over 2 years. All are moderates and currently enjoy the respect of their subordinates. They will have to keep a close eye on hardliners within the ranks, however, and will have to walk a thin line between control and repression in their attempts to deal with Argentina's myriad problems. All are favorably disposed toward the United States and all have had tours of service in Washington, D.C. They will probably work well together, at least at the

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outset, drawing on their long-term professional association and personal friendship.

This publication contains biographic reports, alphabetically arranged, on the three members of the new Argentine junta.

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~~SECRET~~**ARGENTINA****Orlando Ramón AGOSTI Echenique**

**Commander in Chief
of the Air Force;
Member, Ruling Junta**



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Commander in Chief of the Air Force since December 1975, Brig. Gen. Orlando Agosti (pronounced ahGOHStee) became a member of the three-man ruling junta after the military coup that overthrew the government of President María Estela Martínez de Perón on 24 March 1976. A [] professional military officer, Agosti has already proved himself to be an effective and impressive leader. Agosti was chief of staff of the Air Materiel Command from January 1974 to January 1975 and was serving as its commander when he was named head of the air force. His rank is equivalent to that of a lieutenant general in the United States Air Force.

Agosti should work well with his fellow junta members, Adm. Emilio Massera and President Jorge Videla. He got to know the former very well when they were both serving in Washington, D.C., in the early 1960's. Agosti and Videla were reared in the same small town in Buenos Aires Province and have been friends since childhood. Agosti has spoken often of the need for—and importance of—interservice cooperation. Shortly after becoming air force commander, he demonstrated his commitment to that cooperation by lending air support to the joint army and navy counterterrorist operations.

Politics

Like a typical Argentine Air Force officer, Agosti gave the impression of being apolitical during the Peronist administrations of 1973-76. He was known to be anti-Peronist, however, having participated in the first abortive revolt against then President Juan Perón in June 1955. He was exiled to Uruguay until September 1955, when Perón was successfully ousted.

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Agosti is well disposed toward the United States and places considerable value on continued good relations with this country.

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**From Cadet to Commander
in Chief**

Orlando Ramón Agosti Echenique was born in Mercedes, Buenos Aires Province, on 22 June 1924. He attended the Military Aviation School in Córdoba and was commissioned a pilot, third lieutenant, in 1947. During the course of his career he has held the following significant posts: vice president, Aeronautical Map Committee, Pan American Institute of Geography and History (1960); adviser, Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), Washington, D.C. (1962-64); chief, Politics and Doctrine Department, Air Force Headquarters (1966); chief, Special Aerial Warfare Doctrine Committee (1967); chief, Policy Division, Air Force General Staff (1967); deputy commander, 1st Air Brigade, El Palomar Air Force Base (1969); deputy superintendent, Military Aviation School (1970); commander, VII Air Brigade, Morón Air Force Base (1971); commander, II Air Brigade, Paraná (1971-72); air attaché, Washington, and delegate and chief of delegation to the IADB (1973-74).

Agosti's appointment in December 1975 as Commander in Chief of the Air Force resulted from a rebellion in which a small group of air force officers attempted to oust the incumbent, Héctor Fautario. The officers also tried unsuccessfully to bring about a government overthrow. The government then removed all major generals, and Agosti, the most senior brigadier, was appointed chief. By prudent handling, he managed to end the revolt swiftly and without bloodshed.

Personal Data

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Married to the former Elba Esther Boccardo, Agosti is the father of one son, Marcelo Orlando, born in 1956, and one daughter, Sonia Raquel, born in 1958.

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ARGENTINA**Emilio Eduardo MASSERA Padula****Commander General
of the Navy; Member,
Ruling Junta**

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After the military coup that ousted the government of President María Estela Martínez de Perón on 24 March 1976, Adm. Emilio Massera (pronounced mahSEHrah), commander general of the navy, became a member of the three-man ruling junta. Massera is an intelligent, professional [redacted] officer, and he is expected to work well with his colleagues on the junta.

In late 1973 then President Juan Perón handpicked Massera to head the navy. Earlier Massera had impressed the President with his skill while serving as a member of the civilian-military committee that prepared the rules for the election that restored democratic government to Argentina in 1973. Massera was considered an acceptable choice for the post of navy chief because he was not as overtly hostile toward Peronism as were other senior navy officers.

Seesaw Popularity

Massera currently appears to have the respect of both peers and subordinates; at times in the past, however, he enjoyed little popularity.

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[redacted] He regained some of his popularity when he directly confronted José López Rega, Minister of Social Welfare and secretary to President Perón, with accusations of misconduct in office. Massera may have been emboldened, [redacted] by threats made against his life by López Rega's Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance, a rightwing death squad.

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**Attitude Toward
the United States**

A friend of the United States, Admiral Massera was enthusiastic about his assignment to this country as an adviser to the Inter-American Defense Board and a student at the Inter-American Defense College during 1963-64. His most recent visit to this country was in February 1975, when he met with the US Chief of Naval Operations and received the Legion of Merit medal.

**From Ensign to Commander
General**

Emilio Eduardo Massera Padula was born on 19 October 1925 in Paraná, Entre Ríos Province. Prior to entering the Naval Academy in 1942, he studied physics and mathematics at the university level for a year. He has held a variety of command, intelligence, academic and staff assignments, including those of: deputy chief, Naval Intelligence Service (1962); chief, 6th Department (Organization), Navy General Staff (1967-68); instructor, Naval War School (1971); and secretary general of the navy (1971-72). Massera held the post of commander of naval operations concurrently with that of commander general of the navy from January to December 1974. As a seagoing officer, he has traveled widely.

Personal Data

[REDACTED] He speaks limited French and English.

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Married to the former Delia Esther Vieyra, Massera has two sons: Eduardo Enrique, born in 1951, and Emilio Esteban, born in 1960.

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[REDACTED] Like her husband, she speaks limited English.

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ARGENTINA**Jorge Rafael VIDELA**

**President of Argentina;
Member, Ruling Junta;
Commander in Chief
of the Army**



On the night of 23-24 March 1976 Army Commander in Chief Lt. Gen. Jorge Videla (pronounced veeDEHlah) led a long-awaited, bloodless coup against the government of Maria Estela Martinez de Peron. On 29 March he was sworn in as the country's 39th President. According to military decree, a junta composed of Videla, Navy Chief Adm. Emilio Massera and Air Force Chief Brig. Gen. Orlando Agosti will exercise supreme authority in the land. As Chief of State, however, Videla will handle all ceremonial duties. Thus far General Videla has proved to be a strong and competent leader, and his wishes will undoubtedly carry considerable weight within the junta.

The Reluctant Dragon

Since he became Commander in Chief of the Army in August 1975, Videla had been the voice of patience within the military, while many officers were lobbying vociferously for putting an end to the inept Peronist government. Ironically, unlike the three army commanders who preceded him, he sincerely tried to keep the army out of politics. Upon taking command he said, "The armed forces does not want to intervene until there is no alternative, for whatever reason." Faced with a nonfunctioning government, rampant terrorism on the left and the right, and an economy near collapse, Videla was compelled to act. Undoubtedly pressures from within the military ranks helped impel him, but evidence suggests that he waited until he personally felt the time was propitious. When the coup came, it was well managed and methodical, bespeaking careful attention to detail and a well-disciplined command structure. Several days before he moved, Videla stated that the government had been intentionally and repeatedly warned that a coup was being planned, in order to provide the administration with every opportunity to correct the direction in which the country had been going and thus avert a military takeover. He attributed the delay in implementing the overthrow to slow planning of how the next government should be constituted.

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Almost Everything in Moderation

The March 1976 coup can best be described as moderate in approach, and to date, Videla's personal moderate conservatism has set the tenor of the military government. Upon taking power, the junta refrained from attacking the Peronists or any other political party. They arrested only a few high-ranking officials of the former government whom they believed to be guilty of malfeasance or abuse of power. There have been no massive arrests, although a considerable number of suspected terrorists have been detained. US Embassy officials believe that the junta's investigation into Mrs. Perón's questionable activities while in office will be fair.

**Coming to Grips
with Terrorism**

One of the new government's first priorities will be countering Argentine terrorism. In this area Videla will not be lenient, although he has been quick to establish a legal framework to disarm the terrorists. On 26 March 1976 the junta issued a series of communiques that dealt with the general problem of security and announced stiff penalties for those inciting violence or attacking public services. In accordance with the Code of Military Justice, special war councils will be established throughout the country to judge accused persons and impose sentences on those found guilty. Another communique, on the unauthorized possession of arms and explosives, was aimed primarily at the numerous extralegal groups that have proliferated in Argentina during the last several years. Videla has appointed a tough army officer who is a former federal police chief to head the Interior Ministry. He will be charged with the overall campaign against leftwing guerrillas and rightwing vigilante groups.

The Economy

Equally as urgent as the terrorist problem is the nation's economy. Admittedly not personally versed in economics, Videla has appointed as his Minister of Economy an experienced and competent businessman who appears to have a good grasp of the complex problems facing Argentina. The Minister will try to implement a moderate austerity program, emphasizing less state participation in the economy. Also stressed will be fiscal responsibility, export promotion, and favorable attention to the neglected agricultural sector. Videla has already stated his intention to create a favorable climate for foreign investment, and he does not plan to nationalize any private or foreign firms.

Neutralizing Labor

Part of the key to Videla's success rests with his ability to deal effectively with the large and powerful labor movement that has traditionally been the backbone of the Peronist movement. To date, the junta has handled labor intelligently and prudently. The military has assumed direction of the national

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General Confederation of Labor (CGT), but most of its member unions are functioning normally. Only the most corrupt union leaders have been arrested; however, the so-called "62 Organizations"—those unions within the CGT considering themselves followers of the late President (1946-55; 1973-74) Juan Perón—have been banned, because they were highly politicized and at least several were well armed.

The workers have cooperated to date, and the staggering absenteeism that had previously plagued industry disappeared immediately after the coup. The junta confirmed the 20 percent wage increase that had been granted to labor on 1 March 1976; it rescinded additional benefits that the Perón administration had granted at the same time. One test of Videla's strength will come when he attempts to impose his austerity program on the pampered labor movement.

Dealing with Political Parties

Videla has tried to show restraint in dealing with the myriad political organizations in Argentina. He has banned several extreme leftwing parties, mainly Trotskyite and Maoist in orientation, but has left the charters of the other parties intact. An avowed anti-Communist himself, Videla has nevertheless allowed the Moscow-oriented Communist Party of Argentina to keep its charter.

The Congress has been dismissed, and political activity has been suspended. Perhaps it is wishful thinking, but several US Embassy sources have expressed hope that limited political activity will be allowed to resume within 6 months. Videla has not set a specific time for lifting the suspension, but his initial moves suggest that he realizes that political repression in Argentina has been counterproductive in the past.

Foreign Policy and Attitude Toward the United States

Like his colleagues on the junta, Videla is favorably disposed toward the United States. He has been to this country several times, most recently in late 1972 on an Argentine-sponsored observation tour. The general will strive to improve Argentina's ties to this country, and he will be looking toward it as a source of investment and new capital. To this end he has promised a quick resolution to the outstanding US investment problems in Argentina.

General Videla will probably wait until his domestic political and economic consolidation is well under way before developing and enunciating a foreign policy. So far he has removed all political appointees and incompetent officials from the Foreign Ministry, but the purge appears to have been evenhanded.

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A Soldier's Soldier

The son of an infantry colonel, Jorge Rafael Videla was born on 2 August 1925 in the small town of Mercedes in Buenos Aires Province, about 75 miles west of the capital. His official biography states that, during his 31-year career in the army, Videla has demonstrated professional responsibility and a profound dedication to duty. From his first assignment in December 1944, as a second lieutenant in the 14th Infantry Regiment, until his appointment as commanding general of the army in August 1975, he held increasingly responsible posts. Among the most significant of his numerous assignments were the following: assistant to the chief, Argentine Delegation to the Inter-American Defense Board, Washington, D.C. (1956-58); director, Military Academy (1971-72); deputy commander, 1st Army Corps (June-December 1973); chief of staff, Army General Staff (December 1973-May 1975); and chief, Joint Staff (July-August 1975).

Prior to his assignment to the Joint Staff, Videla was without a position for several months because the Peronist government saw him as a potential coup organizer. In finally agreeing to have him serve on the Joint Staff, Mrs. Perón's advisers hoped to keep him in a relatively weak post. A month later, because of a military-government confrontation over the appointment of an active duty army colonel to head the Interior Ministry, the Commander in Chief of the Army was forced to resign, and Videla was chosen as a compromise candidate to replace him.

A Man from Another Time

General Videla is well respected within the army, having demonstrated an understanding attitude toward senior officers as well as enlisted men. At the Military Academy, he had the opportunity to influence several future officers and showed himself capable of instructing as well as commanding.

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He loathes corruption and will not tolerate any degree of it within his government.

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Family

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Videla is married to the former Alicia Raquel Hartridge, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] The couple has seven children: Maria Cristina, born in 1949; Jorge Horacio, born in 1950; Alejandro Eugenio, born in 1951; Rafael Patricio, born in 1953; Maria Isabel, born in 1958; Fernando Gabriel, born in 1961; and Pedro, born in 1966. Two of their sons are currently attending the Military Academy.

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